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ABSTRACT

This report sets forth, through an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, a vivid picture of the severe shortage of basic resources in 228 of New York City's public schools. Data come from detailed questionnaires filled out by parents, teachers, and administrators from these schools. These responses indicate that 55% of these school buildings are virtually a half century old, and 9% of the elementary schools and 7% of the high schools date back to the 19th century. Many of the schools need major repairs, and in 29% of the elementary schools, instruction takes place in hallways, gyms, and other converted spaces. In 41% of the elementary schools, 63% of the middle schools, and 64% of the high schools, 6 or more full-time teachers lack permanent state certification. Class sizes are large, and equipment is often missing. Textbooks and even desks and chairs are often lacking. The causes of these resource deficiencies are structural problems in the present state aid system. New York City is routinely shortchanged by the state aid system. For the past 15 years, its per-pupil expenditures have lagged behind the statewide average. The documented gap grows even larger when the needs of the city's students are taken into account. (Contains 1 table, 11 graphs, and 13 endnotes.) (SLD)

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RUNNING ON EMPTY

High Standards and Missing Resources in New York City's Public Schools

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March 1999

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Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc.
6 East 43rd Street
New York, NY 10017
Phone (212) 867-8455 Fax (212) 867-8460
Website: www.cfequity.com

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FOREWORD

In his 1999-2000 Executive Budget message, Governor George Pataki states that over the past few years, New York State's funding for elementary and secondary education "has grown to record levels," and that as "a result of this generous investment, our children are benefiting from improved school facilities, additional textbooks and more computers in the classroom." The Governor implies that the state's job in supporting public education is largely done. The facts, however, do not support this assumption.

Correcting for inflation, the state aid increases of the past two years barely compensate for the huge cutbacks of the early nineties. In real dollars, per-pupil state aid allocations today are still 7% below what they were in 1988-89. Our students, therefore, have fewer resources to help them prepare for the higher standards and challenging testing program that the State Board of Regents is now requiring of all high school graduates.

This report graphically describes, with the most up-to-date figures available, the extent to which New York City's students are still being taught in over-sized classes and inadequate facilities without proper supplies and equipment. It is in this sense that New York City's public schools, even in a high octane economy, are still "running on empty."

The data in this report is based on detailed questionnaires filled out last fall by parents, teachers and administrators from 228 New York City public schools. The massive job of collecting this data was directed by oyeshola olatoye, CFE's Director of Public Engagement, who is also the prime author of this report. Jay Leslie of the NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy took charge of the data analysis.

Funding for the survey and related CFE activities was provided by the Donors' Education Collaborative, the New York Community Trust, the Open Society Institute, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation and the Schott Foundation.

Michael A. Rebell
Executive Director,
Campaign For Fiscal Equity, Inc.

March 1999

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, New York's Board of Regents adopted a challenging of set of new Learning Standards in seven academic areas. They also determined that all students throughout the state must pass a rigorous set of new Regents' exams as a condition for high school graduation. The new Regents' examination requirements are being phased in over a five-year period beginning with the current 11th grade class. The Regents' Chancellor, Carl T. Hayden, has stated that the new learning standards represent "the most significant increase in standards in the history of New York education."[1]

In developing their new program of higher expectations and high stakes testing, the Regents clearly stated that "every child in the state is entitled to the resources necessary to achieve state goals and desired learning outcomes. Every child is entitled to qualified teachers and counselors, up-to-date textbooks and instructional materials, contemporary learning technology, and a safe, clean learning environment."[2] Unfortunately, the Governor and the Legislature have not provided New York City's students with the resources necessary for them to have a fair opportunity to meet the new Regents' standards.

This report sets forth, through an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, a vivid picture of the severe shortage of basic educational resources in 228 of New York City's public schools. We believe the enormous problems described in the following pages represent the effects of cumulative cutbacks which devastated the system during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s and 80s, and the continuous pattern of underfunding by the state that has persisted throughout the 1990s. Unless the State takes steps to remedy these resource deficiencies, many of New York City's public school students will not have a fair opportunity to pass the new Regents' tests.

The causes of these resource deficiencies in New York City schools are structural problems in the present state aid system. Every year, New York State's 711 school districts

spend over $25 billion to educate approximately three million students. Of this total, localities contribute about 55% of all school funds, while the state pays 40% and the federal government pays about 4%. It is a common misconception that the present state education finance system operates like a true, objective formula. In reality, the state aid "formula" is actually a haphazard collection of 48 different formulas, funding streams, caps and hold harmless provisions.

The complex allocation process is only fully understood by a few Albany insiders and is subject to extensive political manipulation. It results in a situation where, according to the State Education Department, low wealth districts in the state spent $6,681 per pupil in 1996-97, while high wealth districts spent $12,752.[3] In *Education Week's* recent national survey, New York State ranked first in the quality of its standards-based reform system, but ranked forty-eighth in the equity in spending per pupil among districts.[4]

New York City is routinely shortchanged by the state aid system. As the state's largest school district, New York City serves more than a third of the state's children. City schools have over 80% of the state's limited English proficient students, and nearly 62% of the students live in concentrated poverty. Nevertheless, for the past 15 years, New York City's per pupil expenditures have lagged behind the statewide average, in spite of the City's extraordinary student needs. The most recent State Education Department data reported that a $1218 per pupil spending gap exists between New York City and the average of all major districts in the rest of the state.[5] This gap grows even larger when the needs of New York City's students are taken into account.

In 1993, The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc. (CFE) filed a constitutional challenge to this inequitable New York State education finance system. Two years later, the New York Court of Appeals issued a landmark preliminary ruling in *CFE v. State of New York*, holding that all children in the state are constitutionally entitled to the opportunity for a "sound basic education." The Court also gave a green light for the case to proceed to trial. Years of extensive trial preparation are almost completed, and the trial is expected to begin soon in Supreme Court, New York County. The Court's preliminary definition of a sound basic education stresses that all

students must have access to up-to-date textbooks, adequately maintained facilities, well-prepared teachers and other important resources. How many of New York City's public school students actually have access to such resources?

As one part of our efforts to answer that question, CFE conducted the "Making the Grade" survey, a broad study of the resources available in New York City public schools. The survey allowed parents, teachers and administrators from all five boroughs to describe the actual problems in their schools caused by the harmful effects of state aid shortfalls. Last fall, one out of every two schools was randomly selected to receive a survey. In all, 228, or 42%, of the sample schools, completed and returned the questionnaires.

In sum, the hundreds of parents, teachers and administrators who completed the surveys reported that:

School Facilities

- 55% of their school buildings are virtually a half century old. Nine percent of these elementary schools and 7% of the high schools date back to the nineteenth century.
- 30% of the elementary schools, 22% of the middle schools and 33% of the high schools have walls and floors which survey respondents believe require major repairs.
- 41% of the middle schools have major plumbing problems, and 33% also reported inadequate restrooms.
- In 29% of the elementary schools, instruction takes place in hallways, gyms and other converted space.

Teacher Qualifications

- In 41% of the elementary schools, 63% of the middle schools and 64% of the high schools, 6 or more full-time teachers lack permanent state certification.
- All schools surveyed reported that at least one, and sometimes as many as five, of their teachers resigned during the 1997-98 year to teach outside the New York City public school system.

Class size

- 71% of the elementary schools reported that the average kindergarten class sizes exceed 24.
- In 50% of the middle schools, seventh grade classes have more than 31 students.
- 44% of the high schools reported that their Biology classes number 31 students or more.

Science Laboratories and Materials

- 21% of the high schools and 33% the of middle schools do not have functioning science laboratories.
- Nearly 75% of the elementary schools reported that their students do not even have access to microscopes.

Computer Technology

- 74% of the elementary schools were not wired for Internet access.
- In 52% of the middle schools and high schools, students did not have access to the World Wide Web.

School Supplies

- 34% of the elementary schools, 56% of the middle schools and 10% of the high schools reported that students need additional desks and chairs.
- Over 25% of the middle schools and high schools reported shortages of textbooks.

School Libraries

- 33% of the high schools, 11% of the middle schools and 26% of the elementary schools reported that their students have inadequate access to their school libraries.
- 10% of the high schools have no school library at all.

Music and Physical Education

- 24% of the high schools reported limited opportunities for physical education.
- 32% of the elementary schools do not have playgrounds.
- 22% of elementary and middle schools and 14% of high schools lack music programs.

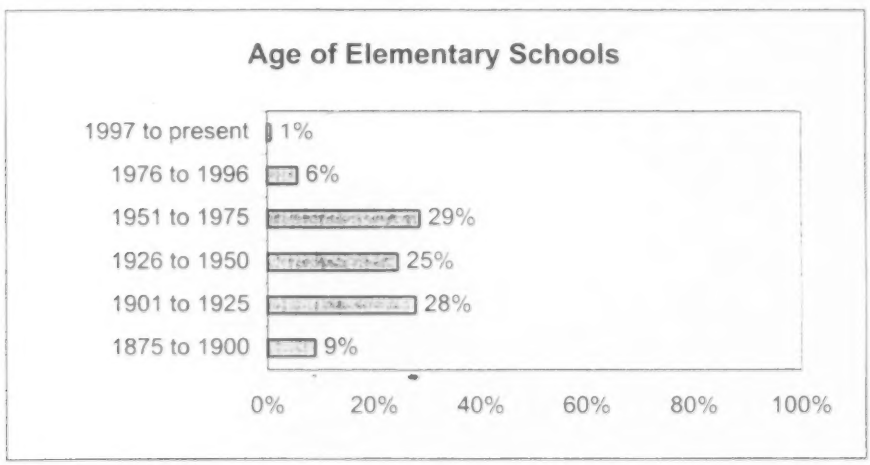
These findings are generally consistent with the comprehensive statistics describing the enormous resource deficiencies in New York City's schools which are set forth in the State Education Department's annual comprehensive analysis, *New York: The State of Learning*, and other major reports issued by the New York City Board of Education and a variety of governmental agencies and civic groups. The survey demonstrates that despite recent increases in state aid and significant education reforms implemented by the New York City Board of Education and the Chancellor, the severe resource deficits in the New York City public schools continue to deprive students of their constitutional right to the opportunity for a sound basic education.

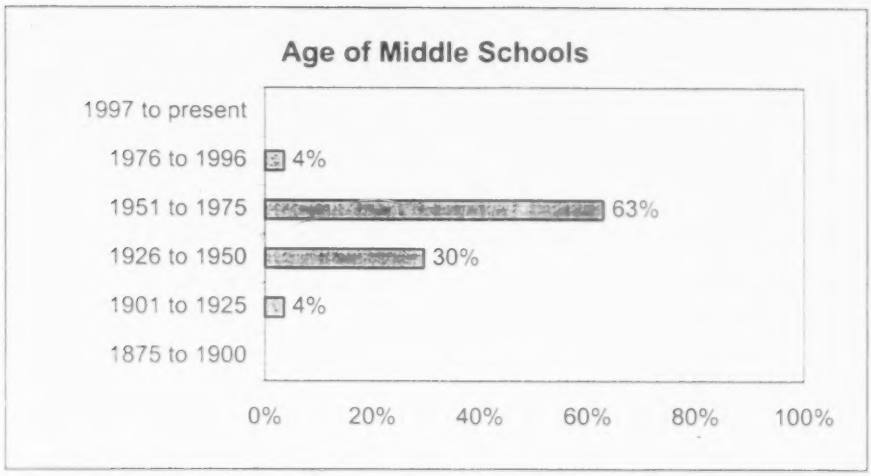
SCHOOL FACILITIES

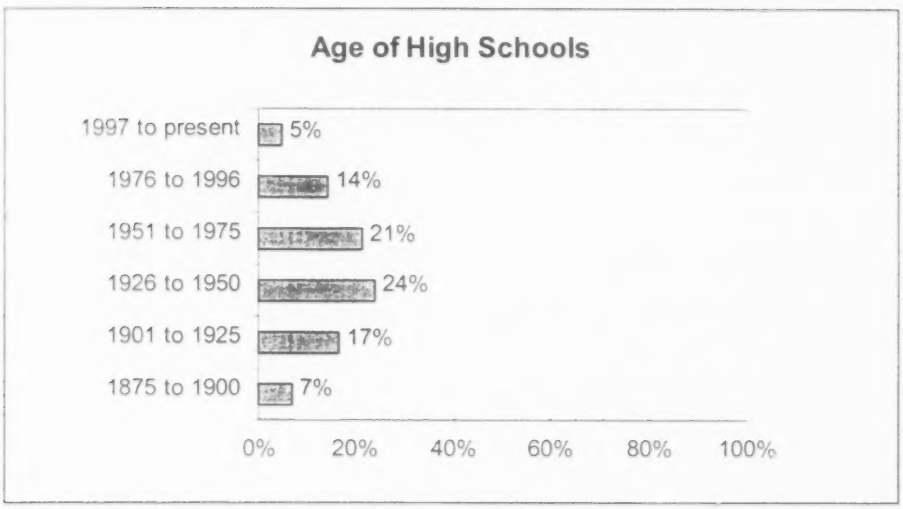
"The...high school was originally designed as an elementary school. Its a very old facility that has never undergone major repair work. The hallways are too narrow, the restrooms are insufficient, the cafeteria is too small, the lockerooms cannot accommodate the extra numbers of students."

-Bronx high school

In its 1995 preliminary definition of a sound basic education, the New York Court of Appeals held that "minimally adequate physical facilities" were needed to provide students the opportunity for a sound basic education. The CFE survey asked schools to identify the age of their buildings and to record major repair and maintenance problems. Out of the 228 schools surveyed, 55% reported that their buildings were built before 1950. Twenty-five percent of the elementary schools and 30% of the middle schools were constructed between 1926 and 1950. Twenty-four percent of the high schools reported that their buildings were built between 1926 and 1950. Nine percent of the elementary schools and 7% of the high schools were actually constructed in the latter half of the nineteenth century.







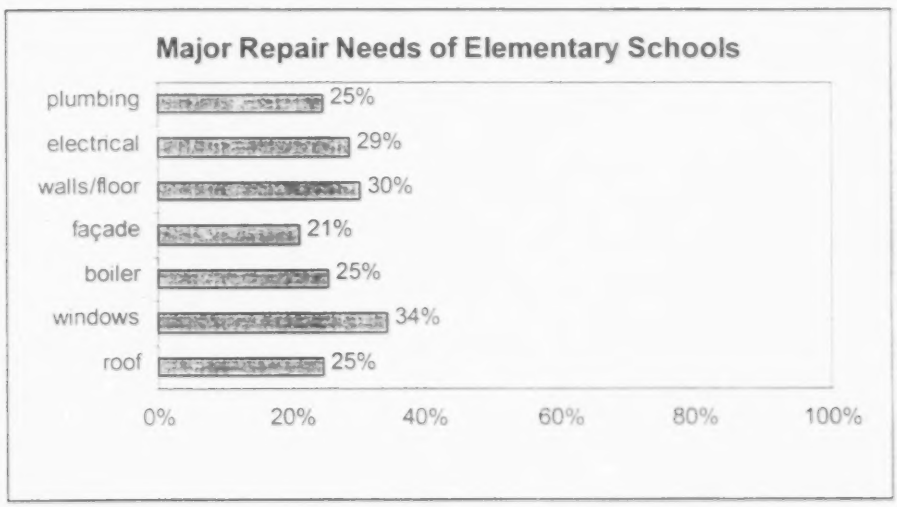
Respondents indicated that many of their schools are in need of major repairs. The most common areas in need of repair are windows, electrical systems, plumbing, walls and floors. Nearly 61% of survey respondents reported that repairs were needed in more than one area. Thirty-five percent of the elementary schools, 22% of the middle schools and 31% of the high schools reported that their windows were in disrepair. A typical description of these problems, provided by a Brooklyn elementary school, was: "In many classrooms, there are windows that are broken and cannot be opened."

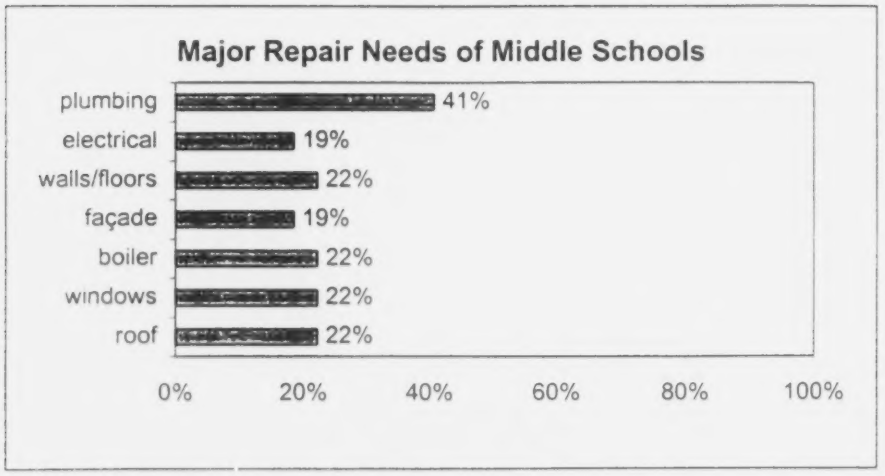
Other descriptions of the physical conditions of school buildings by survey respondents were:

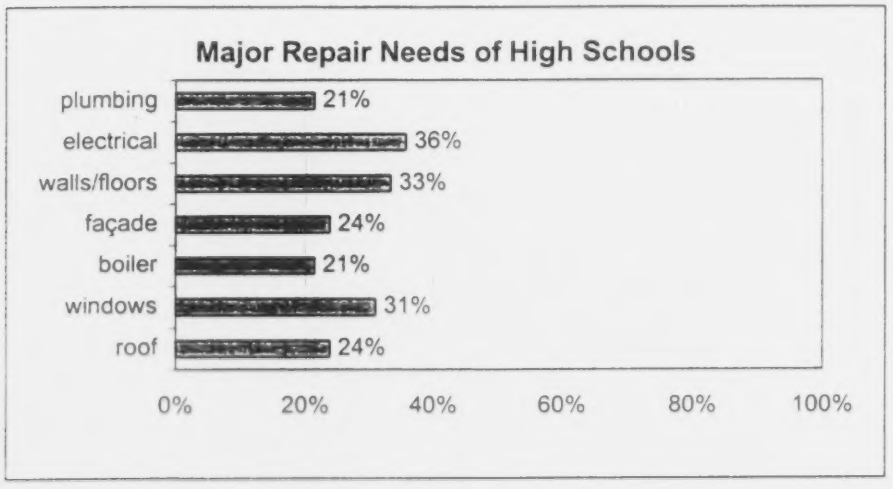
> "We . . . have a portable building that has been condemned. We are in need of extra space."
>
> -Brooklyn elementary school

> "Tiles on the walls are missing in several bathrooms, [and] ventilation is inadequate."
>
> -Manhattan elementary school

Respondents in 29% of the elementary schools, 19% of the middle schools and 36% of the high schools said that their buildings needed major electrical repairs. Thirty percent of elementary schools, 22% of middle schools and 33% percent of high schools reported that their walls and floors required major repairs. In 41% of middle schools and 21% of high schools there were major plumbing problems. Such statistics may explain why 33% of middle schools and 26% of high schools complained of inadequate restroom facilities.




Major Repair Needs of Middle Schools
plumbing
electrical
walls/floors
façade
boiler
windows
roof
41%
19%
22%
19%
22%
22%
22%
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%

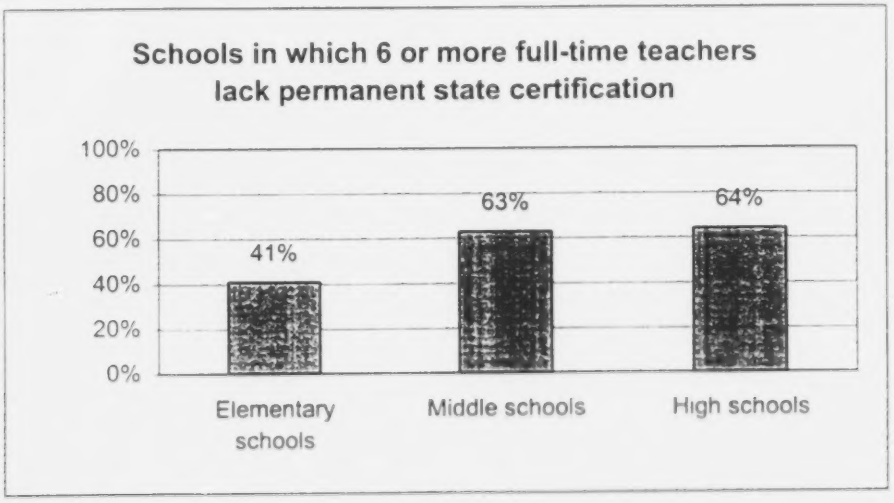

Major Repair Needs of High Schools
plumbing
electrical
walls/floors
façade
boiler
windows
roof
21%
36%
33%
24%
21%
31%
24%
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

"We must be able to attract and keep well-educated and well-trained new teachers. Salaries should be competitive with area[s] surrounding New York City."

-Brooklyn elementary school

Well-trained teachers are an essential component of a successful school. According to the Court of Appeals, the opportunity for a sound basic education requires a "sufficient number of adequately trained personnel." "Adequate training" clearly connotes, at the least, that teachers meet State certification standards. In light of the increasing demands placed on students by the new Learning Standards, teachers should also have specific training in the subject areas they teach.[6] In addition, as the Regents themselves have emphasized, new teachers must receive extensive professional development in the new standards.



However, the latest State Education Department (SED) statistics, which are based on data from the 1996-97 school year, indicated that students in New York City, who include massive numbers of students who live in concentrated poverty or are limited English proficient, are the

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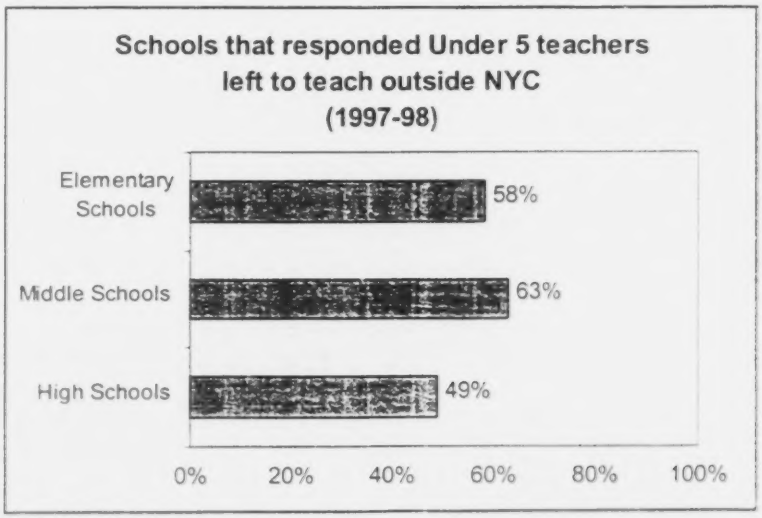
least likely to be taught by qualified, experienced teachers. New York City' schools had the state's highest percentage of uncertified teachers, 10.9%, and the highest percentage of annual teacher turnover, 16% per year.[7] Our survey results confirm that this scandalous situation remains largely unchanged in 1998-99. The survey found that in 40% of elementary schools, 63% of middle schools and 64% of high schools, 6 or more teachers lacked state certification.

Teacher turnover also affects the learning environment. The loss of experienced teachers deprives students of those with the most expertise, and it denies novice teachers mentoring by seasoned colleagues. Survey questions, therefore, asked schools how many full-time teachers resigned during the 1997-98 academic year to teach outside of New York City.

The vast majority of schools reported a teacher exodus, apparently due to the draw of higher salaries in the suburbs. Despite the area's high cost of living, New York City has among the lowest teacher salaries in the state.[8] City teachers earn almost $2,000 below the state average and nearly $20,000 less than the average downstate suburban teacher. Many schools indicated that more than six full-time teachers had resigned to teach outside of the city school system. However, the majority of respondents reported losing under five teachers in 1997-98. For that same year, 58% of elementary schools reported losing under five full-time teachers. Nearly two-thirds of middle schools and 49% of the high schools reported losing under five teachers.



CLASS SIZE and OVERCROWDING

"Our school is severely overcrowded. . . . Classes [are] over cap and [we] bus 200 students from our school every morning. There are no rooms for special instructional activities such as art, science and dance, etc. Our gym is insufficient to accommodate the student population at our school. We run a split-session kindergarten to alleviate overcrowding in this grade. Our playground is grossly insufficient and [we] have a rooftop playground that has never opened due to the fact that [it] is still unsafe. Breakfast runs from 7am to 9:30am and lunch runs from 9:55am to 2:15am daily. We have 9 entrances/exits and one security officer."

-Manhattan elementary school

Recent national research which demonstrates a strong link between smaller classes and improved student achievement has led to major initiatives to reduce class size. The federal government has also initiated a program of aid to the states that aims to reduce class sizes nationwide in grades 1-3 to an average of 18 students. In 1997, the New York State legislature enacted a five-year education reform program known as LADDER which pledged to reduce class sizes in grades K-3 to twenty students per class statewide.

It is clear that New York City's schools have a substantial need for these promised class size reduction resources. Our survey found that 49% of the surveyed New York City elementary schools have over-sized classes – that is, class sizes exceeding the statewide average. Class sizes ranged from 25 to 30 students in both kindergarten and third grade classes compared to a statewide average of 22. Fifty-four percent of the elementary schools surveyed reported that their fifth grade class exceeded 31 students. In 50% of the middle schools, seventh grade classes numbered 31 or more students. Class sizes exceeded 31 students in 32% of ninth grade English classes and 44% of U.S. history classes. In Regents Biology classes, 44% of high schools reported that their class size numbered 31 or more students.

CLASS SIZE FINDINGS

Grade	18 to 24 Students	25 to 30 Students	31 or More Students
Kindergarten	29%	71%	0%
Grade 3	9%	77%	14%
Grade 5	3%	43%	54%
English 7	8%	42%	50%
English 9	24%	44%	32%
U.S. history	15%	41%	44%
Biology	18%	38%	44%

School overcrowding requires extraordinary scheduling changes, relocation of students to other facilities and the use of portable building structures. The survey found that relocation most severely affected the city's youngest students. Fifteen percent of elementary schools reported that their students are relocated to other facilities, while 17% use portable classrooms. In 29% of the elementary schools, instruction takes places in hallways, gyms and other converted space.

Several schools revealed the following astounding facts:

> "We do use [a converted] shower room for instruction. Guidance [takes place] in [a converted] closet."[9]
>
> -Manhattan elementary school

> "There is a lack of space for support services (occupational therapy, counseling,) etc. The providers of these services are in [converted] closets, shower rooms, etc."
>
> -Manhattan elementary school

Schools identified insufficient space and large class sizes as major impediments to providing a sound basic education. In fact, 26% of the schools reported that their student

enrollment exceeded their official building capacity. At the high school level, 38% of the schools operated multiple sessions; 22% of elementary schools and 11% of middle schools also reported extraordinary scheduling changes due to overcrowding. A Queens high school principal wrote,

> "Our high schools in Queens are very overcrowded and growing yearly. Staff meetings are held on 3 different shifts and students have less access to teams and clubs with our overlapping schedules. . . . My cafeteria serves lunch for 6 periods and it is still overcrowded and poses security problems."

Another high school, located in Brooklyn, wrote,

> "[The] building is too small to accommodate 325 students. . . . There is no gym, library or cafeteria. There is one bathroom with one toilet for over 40 staff members."

From a Queens elementary school came the following statement:

> "The size of our population and the shortage of space is our main concern. Even with the new annex we are still overcrowded and many areas in our school do double and triple duty. [There is] no office space for guidance, SBST [Special education evaluation and support teams] ESL [English as a Second Language], etc."

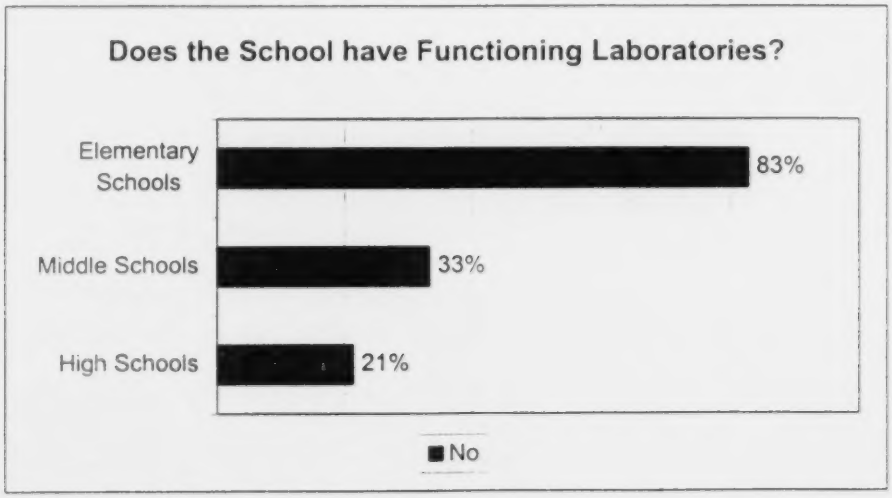
LEARNING TOOLS

"Teachers copy information from books for their classes because there is an insufficient number of books on hand."

-Brooklyn high school

Science Laboratories and Materials

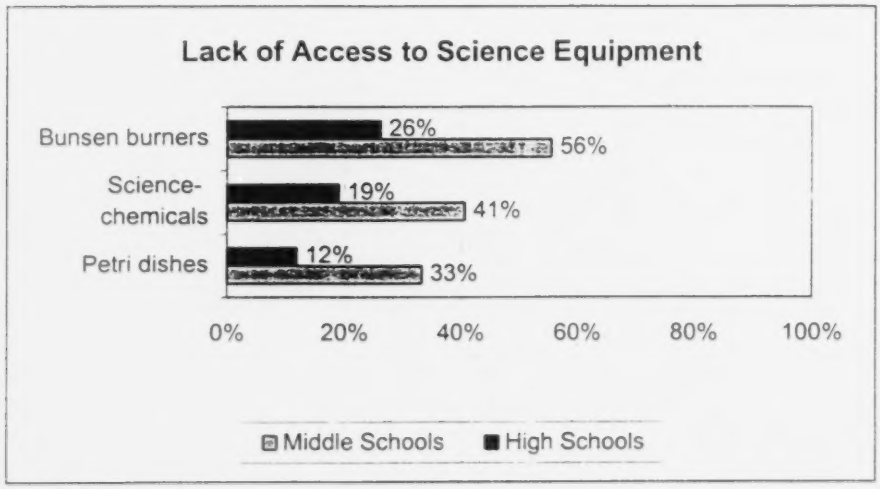
One of the survey's most startling findings was that over 21% of the high schools do not have functioning science laboratories. This fact is particularly unsettling given the new Regents' requirement that every student pass an exam in science to graduate from high school. Although most high schools set aside space for science classes, many of these spaces are clearly not laboratories, and these schools are not able to provide students with a true laboratory experience. One Manhattan high school wrote, "We are woefully under-stocked. We do not have a single fully functioning science lab."



The lack of access to up-to-date science laboratories is even more pronounced in the city's middle schools. One Bronx intermediate school wrote, "[This] [s]chool lacks a science lab

for 7th and 8th graders. [T]his is a serious handicap, especially in view of the upcoming assessments." Thirty-three percent of middle schools reported that they did not have science laboratories.

In addition to antiquated and nonexistent science laboratories, the data reveals that a majority of the city's middle schools and high schools we surveyed also lack basic science materials. The paltry provision of science laboratories and materials practically guarantees failure for thousands of students on the impending Regents science examinations. Forty-one percent of middle schools and 26% of high schools reported that appropriate science chemicals such as sulfur and iodine were not available. Fifty-seven percent of middle schools and a shocking 88% of high schools reported that their students did not have access to a Bunsen burner. Thirty-three percent of middle schools and 19% of high schools did not have petri dishes. Fifteen percent of middle schools did not provide their students with microscopes, and 21% did not even have test tubes.



A Manhattan high school wrote,

> "While there are Bunsen burners supplied to the building, the gas to operate such has been unavailable due to . . . [a] lack of response. Both science demonstration rooms lack flu hoods to

> remove odors and chemical residue which naturally occur in class demonstrations."

Another Manhattan high school wrote,

> "Our [science] lab is rudimentary. It has a source for water but not gas or air."

Elementary schools surveyed reported that they had little to no science equipment. Eighty-three percent of elementary schools did not have functioning science laboratories. Nearly 75% of elementary schools responded that their students did not have consistent access to microscopes.

A Brooklyn elementary school principal wrote:

> "Most of my cluster teachers do not have their own room[;] therefore they must travel to each classroom. These fine teachers cannot provide the same kind of lessons traveling as they could if they had their own room. My early childhood science teacher and my math teacher would be much more effective if they had their own space…imagine an actual 'lab!'"

One Queens elementary school wrote,

> "We have no labs. We have very little science equipment. We run a hands-on science program with the help of PA [Parent Association] donations."

Computer Technology

In recent years, the city and the Board of Education have made improving technology a major priority. In 1996, Chancellor Rudy Crew implemented "Project Smart," a program designed to furnish modern computer technology to middle schools.[10] These efforts have, in fact, resulted in an impressive investment of computer equipment in the city's middle schools.

The Chancellor's efforts to make New York City's students computer literate are impeded, however, by a serious, underlying problem – the fact that many of the city's older schools cannot easily accommodate the new computer technology. Many schools simply lack the appropriate electrical infrastructure to support computer network services. A Bronx elementary school wrote, "Electrical wiring upgrade is necessary to accommodate new computers. Many classrooms share the same electrical circuit." Thirty-eight percent of high schools and 29% of elementary schools reported major electrical deficiencies. A Bronx high school wrote, "We need schools in 1998 that are not wired as they were in 1928."

Almost 52% of the middle schools and high schools surveyed still lack access to the World Wide Web. Fifty-seven percent of high school respondents said that they had no computers in individual classrooms. Most high schools reported having a computer laboratory, although 14% said that they did not have a computer teacher. Fourteen percent of high schools also reported that they only had a part-time computer teacher. The survey found the greatest need for basic technology in the city's elementary schools. Twenty percent of elementary schools did not have a computer room or laboratory. Seventy-four percent of elementary schools were not wired for the Internet. Eighteen percent of elementary schools reported that they did not have a computer teacher.

A Manhattan elementary school wrote,

> "We . . . have old, antiquated equipment. The majority of teachers are not trained or given enough equipment (software) for classroom use on a daily basis."

School Supplies

The Court of Appeals held that a sound basic education requires the provision of certain basic essentials such as "minimally adequate instrumentalities of learning, including supplies such as desks, chairs, pencils and reasonably current textbooks." We asked participating schools if they had sufficient numbers of these learning tools. The results were alarming. Thirty-four

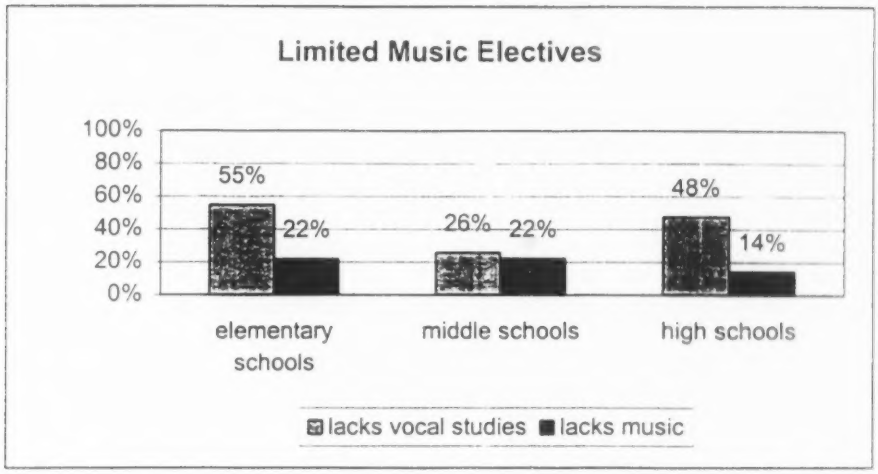
percent of elementary schools, 56% of middle schools and 10% of high schools reported an insufficient number of desks and chairs for their students. Despite the Board of Education's recent infusion of funds for textbooks, 26% of middle schools and high schools surveyed still reported a shortage of textbooks and supplies. A Staten Island middle school teacher stated, "Much of what we are presently using is old, outdated and worn."

School Libraries

Most public schools reported that they have a school library, but our data indicates that in many cases the libraries are poorly stocked or that students have limited access to such facilities. Ten percent of high schools surveyed reported that they lacked a school library. Twenty-six percent of elementary schools, 11% of middle schools and 33% of high schools reported that their students had inadequate access to a school library. A Brooklyn elementary school wrote, "The school's library size is inadequate. [I]t was designed to serve grades K-4. However, we are a pre-K-8th grade school." The survey asked schools if their libraries have sufficient numbers of periodicals and reference materials. Over a third of elementary schools, 11% of middle schools and 17% of high schools answered no.

Music and Physical Education

Among the schools surveyed, we found substantial gaps in the availability of music and physical education programs in the surveyed elementary schools and middle schools and high schools. The survey found that 55% of the elementary schools, 26% of the middle schools and 40% of the high schools did not offer vocal, or choral, courses. Moreover, 22% of elementary and middle schools and 14% of high schools had no music programs at all.



Over one-third of the respondents complained of a lack adequate physical education opportunities. Twenty-three percent of elementary schools did not have gymnasiums. Thirty-six percent of elementary schools also reported that time for physical education was limited. A shocking 32% of the elementary schools did not even have playgrounds.

In many of the schools that offered art, music and physical education classes, respondents wrote that the offerings were wholly inadequate to meet the needs of all students.

> "Although 'yes' was answered to many questions regarding such items as . . . art, music, physical education,. . .there still remains a grossly inadequate amount of all of these items in our school building. With 1,800 students, we require an equitable amount of each of the above items for all the students to be adequately served. The extremely large student population will never be equitably served in a building this size."
>
> -Manhattan elementary school

> "Due to the infrastructure, we have no auditorium. Our cafeteria is used as a gym space. During lunch (two back to back) gym has to take place in the classroom or in the hallway. The playground has been condemned due to unsafe physical conditions."
>
> -Bronx elementary school

> "Larger rooms are divided by a wall to create two small rooms for special education classes. There is no gymnasium and only a small area outdoors for recreation at lunch time. The indoor area is used as a student cafeteria and only a small portion is left for indoor recreation. The gymnasium has been made into three classrooms."
>
> -Manhattan elementary school

Participating high schools also reported a dearth of physical education programs. Fourteen percent of the high schools do not have gymnasiums. These structural limitations explain why 24% of high schools reported an insufficient amount of physical education opportunities available to students.

A Manhattan high school wrote,

> "There is no auditorium, no proper gymnasium – lack of a gym creates [a] real problem in maintaining a physical education program."

CONCLUSION

Funding initiatives from the city and the state have, in recent years, begun to repair New York City's aging school buildings, to expand professional development opportunities for teachers, and to increase the number of computers and basic textbooks in the city's schools. The resource deficiencies which have accumulated through decades of savage neglect are, however, so massive that even during the current boom years, tens of thousands of elementary school students lack playgrounds, most first year teachers are still being denied proper mentoring opportunities, and many high school students still do not have individual textbooks that they can take home to do their basic assignments.

The even greater deficit in the city's school resources involves the huge class sizes — 30% above current state averages and 40% above the Legislature's own goals for K-3 classes — the enormous number of uncertified teachers, and the dearth of science laboratories, computer infrastructure, libraries and other basic resources which starkly deprive New York City's students of any meaningful opportunity to meet the high expectations of the Regents' Learning Standards. Even with herculean efforts by the Board, the Chancellor and the city's teachers, administrators and parents, without a substantial increase in state aid, thousands of New York City students will simply fail to make the grade.

The Regents' standards are based on the premise that virtually all students can learn at high academic levels. We believe that New York City's public school students can meet this daunting, but fully appropriate challenge — if they are given necessary supports and a fair opportunity to do so. New York State's current education finance system, however, continues the cruel pattern of providing the fewest resources to the students with the greatest needs. The State Education Department "document[ed] a dismaying alignment of disadvantaged students (disproportionately children of color), schools with the poorest educational resources (fiscal and human) and substandard achievement."[11]

CFE is committed to rectifying this historic inequity. We are vigorously pursing a constitutional challenge to the state aid system, and we are working with a wide of variety of state and citywide organizations and concerned citizens to develop reform principles for fair funding and effective accountability that will ensure the opportunity for a sound basic education for all students.

We hope the information provided in this report will serve as a tool to inform public discussions about the state of education in New York City's public schools. While CFE presses the court challenge, the battle to end the inequities in state education aid must also include the public's participation and support. There is a role for everyone. Parents, teachers, administrators, students and concerned citizens may use the *Running on Empty* report to understand their school's particular needs and to press state officials to provide New York City school children with the opportunity for a sound basic education. The future health and stability of New York State's economy rests upon the degree to which high school graduates possess the skills necessary to function in an increasingly competitive global society. It is incumbent upon the State to provide all students with the basic school resources to meet this challenge.

METHODOLOGY

The "Making the Grade" survey sought to assess resources available at a randomly selected sample of 50% of New York City's public schools. CFE secured a computer generated list of New York City's 1,100 public. We then selected every second entry on the list as a sample school. This sampling method identified 550 schools to which we sent a questionnaire. Each school had an equal chance (50%) of being selected for the survey sample.

Sample schools were assigned a code with their borough, grade level and a sequential number. This coding system preserved schools' anonymity and aided in the data collection and analysis process. Survey results were analyzed at New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy. Statistical data was generated by a survey analysis computer software package. Surveys were scanned into three databases using the Optical Mark Recognition software. These results were used to prepare charts and graphs that illustrate the deficiencies in basic resources within New York City's public schools.

Two hundred and twenty-eight schools, 42%, returned completed questionnaires. Surveys were completed by members of school leadership teams which are comprised of administrators, teachers and other school personnel.[12] CFE staff employed a standard methodological approach in conducting this mail survey.[13] Survey participants received a series of four mailings. The first mailing alerted schools to the onset of the project. The second mailing contained a cover letter and the survey instrument. The third mailing reminded participants of the deadline and included an additional copy of the survey. Lastly, schools were sent a thank you letter and a copy of this report.

The survey instrument covered a wide range of school-level resources such as facilities, class size, curriculum offerings, school personnel and technology. Survey questions were grounded in the 1995 Court of Appeals' template definition of the opportunity for a "sound basic education." The Court held that such an opportunity requires the following essential resources:

- Minimally adequate physical facilities.

- Minimally adequate instrumentalities of learning, including supplies such as desks, chairs, pencils and reasonably current textbooks.

- Minimally adequate teaching of reasonably up-to-date curricula.

- A sufficient number of adequately trained personnel.

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[1] "Regents Vote: Students Must Pass Regents Exams." The State Education Department/The University of the State of New York, Press Release, April 24, 1996, p. 1.

[2] *A New Compact for Learning:* Improving Public Elementary, Middle and Secondary Education Results in the 1990s, p. 18.

[3] "*Final Approval of Regents Proposal on State Aid to School Districts for School Year 1999-2000 and Beyond*," The State Education Department, 1998, Exhibit 6, p. 9.

[4] *Education Week*, Vol. XVIII, No. 17, January 11, 1999, pp. 113-121.

[5] *State Aid to Schools: A Primer*, July 1998, The State Education Department, the State Aid Work Group, iv.

[6] Analysis adapted from the information provided by the State Board of Regents at www.nysed.gov/rscs/gradreq.html.

[7] Statistics from *New York: The State of Learning*, April 1998, a report from the Regents and State Education Department to the Governor and the Legislature, p. 83.

[8] Statistics from *New York: The State of Learning*, April 1998, a report from the Regents and State Education Department to the Governor and the Legislature, p. 81.

[9] All anecdotes taken from "Making the Grade" survey respondents' written comments.

[10] PROJECT SMART, *An Abstract*, New York City Board of Education website, www.nycboe.nycenet.edu, p. 1.

[11] Statistics from *New York: The State of Learning*, April 1998, a report from the Regents and State Education Department to the Governor and the Legislature, i.

[13] Salant, Pricillia and Don A. Dillman, How to Conduct Your Own Survey (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994) pgs. 45-49.